DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 278 143 EA 019 142

AUTHOR Hare, Dwight
TITLE The Expansion of Educational Foundations into Non-Educational Areas: An Example and a Proposal.
PUB DATE 86
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Studies Association (Pittsburgh, PA, 1986).
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Dental Hygienists; *Educational Attitudes; *Education Courses; *Foundations of Education; Higher Education; Nonmajors; Organizational Communication; Public Opinion; *Relevance (Education)
IDENTIFIERS Northeast Louisiana University

ABSTRACT

Courses in the Foundations of Education are widely perceived as superfluous or out of touch with current needs. One way of correcting these perceptions is to make sure that when students not majoring in education take the classes they get some benefit from them. A course in educational foundations was required of all dental hygiene majors at Northeast Louisiana University, but the course was geared toward elementary and early childhood education majors. A revised version of the course, open only to dental hygiene majors, permitted the instructor to focus on dental hygiene and on the students' needs for experience in conducting research and for understanding the instructional methods appropriate to the teaching of dental health practices to individuals or groups. The revisions in the course may have been instrumental in the decision by those in charge of the Dental Hygiene Program to keep the course a requirement despite official requests that the program suggest courses to be dropped. The quality of educational foundations courses in general remains in need of improvement, and further outreach to nonmajors should be attempted to help education enhance its status in the academic world. (PGD)

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The Expansion of Educational Foundations into Non-Educational Areas: An Example and a Proposal

Dwight Hare, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor

Northeast Louisiana University

306 Strauss Hall

College of Education

Monroe, LA 71209-0230

(318) 342-4079/4087

Paper prepared for the Annual Meeting of the

American Educational Studies Association

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

1986

EA 019 142

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The Expansion of Educational Foundations into Non-Educational Areas: An Example and a Proposal

These are trying times for education. Nationally, test scores are down or, at least, are not up; drug abuse on campuses is rising; illiteracy is a growing concern; teen pregnancy is increasing; there is a growing shortage of teachers of excellence; and school and college financing is being cut at the state level when both can afford such cuts the least. Louisiana leads the nation in these categories and others. Public school and college funding has been cut the past two years and this year appears to be the worst so far. Degree programs are being eliminated, vacant faculty positions are going unfilled, and filled faculty positions are being vacanted.

The AESA News and Comment (Vol. 16, No. 2) announcing this second convention also relays problems facing the Foundations. The Committee on Academic Standards and Accreditation reports 'increasing efforts to water down foundations programs' (p. 3). Peter Sola and Joel Spring relate problems encountered with trying to convince the Educational Testing Service that the Foundations are sufficiently 'relevant' to teacher education for inclusion as test items on the National Teachers Examination (p. 3). Peter Sola further reports that our Foundation courses 'are becoming victims of the newly revised state certification requirements that label these classes as superfluous, out of touch, or unnecessary for the modern classroom teacher to be

effective' (p. 4). It would seem, then, that these are bad times indeed for those of us in the Foundations.

Though we can all agree we must continue the fight to preserve and strengthen foundation courses within education, it seems there are also steps we should take to promote educational foundations outside our colleges and schools of education, and into the University and the community. This paper offers an example of the adaptation of a basic Educational Foundations course to satisfy the needs of a non-education discipline, and suggests other ways Foundations can be utilized outside colleges of educations. I argue that those of us in Foundations have done a poor job of convincing others inside education how valuable we are, or could be, to them. I also argue we have done nothing to convince those outside we are of any value at all. To a large extent, the role Foundations will play in the changed education programs of the future depends on our actions, or inactions, today.

An Adapted Course

Our University offers a program of studies leading to a B.S. degree in Dental Hygiene. After two years of general undergraduate studies, students are admitted as juniors to the two year Dental Hygiene program. Here they begin more specialized courses such as chemistry, anatomy, physiology, nutrition, etc. Beginning the second semester of their junior year, students

begin working with patients in the clinic. Here they begin cleaning teeth and learning other, more advanced dental hygiene practices.

Students also take courses outside Dental Hygiene and related sciences. Courses are required in psychology, counseling, education, etc. It is the education course that is of interest to us here.

It is believed by the directors of the Dental Hygiene Program that their future Dental Hygienists will spend a considerable amount of their professional time dealing with aspects of preventive dental health. As hygienists, they will teach patients proper care of teeth and mouth as well as general physical health as it relates to dental health. It is also believed the hygienists may be involved in teaching groups proper dental health care, such as in a public health setting. This course in education was to instruct dental hygiene students in the application of educational methodology (goals, instruction, and evaluation) in the design and implementation of dental hygiene education programs. Additionally, the course was to prepare future dental hygienists 'for graduate and advanced professional programs'.

But the course itself, Educational Foudations 401, was designed for education majors. It is titled Test and Measurement and half the semester is spent on the process of

classroom evaluation - the identification of objectives, the development of a table of specifications, the creation of good, appropriate test items, and the evaluation of the test or other evaluation procedure. Furthermore, the majority of students taking the class are elementary-early childhood majors and much time is spent in discussions such as the importance of learning to discriminate shapes before learning to distinguish letters of the alphabet and the importance of both in learning to read.

To dental hygiene students in the class, the course was little more than an exercise in futility: not only was the course intended for and taught toward education majors, but time spent in class or on classwork meant less time available for the clinic, patients and the practice of dental health care. While the education majors generally took the course as seniors during the semester before student teaching, the dental hygiene majors took the course at any time they could schedule it during their junior or senior years. Also, while there were usually some 15-20 elementary majors together, seldom were there more than one or two dental hygiene students in each class section.

To the hygienists, such a course established program directors as creating a meaningless curriculum, the course instructor as being as irrelevant as the course, education courses as a waste, and education majors as concerned with unimportant issues. As a result, hygienists were not

satisfied with the class, were not adequately served, and Foundations was once again labeled as superfluous, out of touch, and unnecessary.

As instructor of the course, I was dissatisfied with the arrangement and the results. Though I was appreciative of an extra student or two in each class to ensure a sufficient number of students for the class to 'make', I was not satisfied with my attempts at meeting the needs of so diverse a class.

A meeting with the Dental Hygiene Program Directors provided further insight not only into their expectations of the education course, but also into the expectations of the Program. Two major concerns were expressed. First, the Directors believed strongly in the teaching role of dental hygiene. Their commitment to preventive dentistry through a client education program was strong. They wanted students to learn not only how to teach but to also learn how to evaluate their teaching.

A second concern involved a growing emphasis on research within national dental hygiene professional organizations and dental hygiene teaching and certification programs. The Directors wanted their students exposed to three areas of research: reading research articles to remain current with the literature, interpreting and applying research findings appropriate for dental hygienists, and conducting research appropriate to the current practice of hygienists and the

dentist with whom they practice.

A number of realizations were immediately apparent. For one, the Directors were desiring a specialized course which would tie much of the course work students had taken and would take to the idea of future practice. It was also obvious that EDF-401, as taught, was serving the interests of neither the dental hygiene students, the program Directors, or the profession of dental hygiene. It was also apparent that any attempts to address the desires of the program Directors and the needs of students would require students take a revised course as cohorts.

This proposal was acceptable to the program Directors and to my department chair and EDF-401 for dental hygiene majors only was offered during the 1986 spring semester. The 19 juniors in the program were required to take the course as a cohort group, except for two who had previously taken the course.

Organizationally, the course was taught in three sections: descriptive statistics and research methodology; analysis and interpretation of research articles; and teaching current dental health practices. The descriptive statistics and research methodology section was necessary for the analysis and interpretation of research articles which in turn formed the basis of the good dental health practices they were to teach.

During the course of the semester, a number of events and comments prompted some modifications and changes in course content and student attitudes. For example, many students entered dental hygiene because it was a good source of income and an appropriate occupation for wives. That is, all of the students were female, the hours of work were compatible with having children in school (daytime, Monday through Friday), and it was an urban occupation (jobs are generally available in urban areas when dental hygiene wives move with spouses). To some students, however, it was quite a shock to learn that some of the journal authors had no more than a B.S. degree, and that some were faculty members (like their program chairs) with M.S. degrees. They began to see that some of the research they were to read and practices they were to adapt were written and developed by hygienists not unlike themselves.

It also became known to me that the students were required in a number of courses to 'do research'. Virtually all students confined this to 'library research', where they were assigned a topic and told to go find what was written about it. Therefore, one of the first adaptations was to make students aware of <u>who</u> was writing and to develop an awareness of the positions and perspectives of those writing. That is, what is the difference in the articles (assumptions, conclusions) written by dentists and by hygienists; and what is the difference in journal articles

and chapters found in texts.

About this time, two senior hygienists who had taken EDF 401 with the education majors came to me with a problem. They had been assigned a research project in a senior level dental hygiene class and were allowed to choose their own topic. They were interested in the practices of other dental hygiene programs, developed a questionnaire based on an article they had read, mailed it at their own expense, and had gotten a large number back. Their problem was they did not know what to do with it. They had no idea how to code responses, enter on the computer, run programs, or analyze the data. I developed a coding system for them, showed them how to code each response, had the data entered on computer, ran the program, and helped them with analysis. They wrote the paper and received rave reviews. The students in class who did not identify with doing original research could identify with high grades. That is, some students began to see the course had utility and usefulness.

An Analysis and Implications

This is not to suggest we all lived happily ever after. The course will be taught again this spring and it will be a new class of juniors to convince the course is worthwile, and can be of use while in school and as practitioners. But there are, it seems to me, a few comments to be made.

Because of the budget cuts at our University, the Directors

were asked to make suggestions of courses that could be dropped from the dental hygiene program without a reduction in program quality. EDF 401 was not among those listed. This is important to my department as it helped maintain our student credit hours at a time of faculty reduction and increased class size.

The reputation of the College of Education across campus has never been great. As a faculty member, this is more than guilt by association; it is a guilt by reputation. It is not just that professors of education are not instructors of quality, it is that 'education' as a field is not desired and is not of quality.

I've come to understand this problem as part of the professional school-discipline debate. Dental Hygiene seems to be a professional school in that it applies to knowledge of a number of disciplines. What I've tried to do is provide new knowledges they can apply to the knowledges they already have.

Such an approach, I think, has a number of implications. First and most important, Colleges of Education are seen as important and vital institutions on University campuses. Admittedly, dental hygiene may not enjoy the status of medicine or law, but it is a 'hard' science. At my University, it is in the School of Allied Health Sciences, along with medical technology, pre-dentistry, and pre-medicine.

Also of importance is the establishment of professors of education as having useful and important knowledge and skills. The Foundations of Education are important in and of themselves, but they are valuable because of what we can do with them.

The list could go on, but let me end this section with two more points. I began this paper by noting the problems the Foundations are facing today: attempts to 'water down' programs, not sufficiently 'relevant' for the NTE, and 'superfluous, out of touch, (and) unnecessary' for the classroom teacher. I could, in large measure, agree; but I would also argue we have not been very successful in convincing anyone - program administrators, the NTE, and especially classroom teachers - that what we have to teach is worth knowing. That is, either we have not taught students what to do with what we teach them, or what we teach them is of no use.

A second point is that I have benefited, personally and professionally, from this association with a non-education program. The data collected by the two dental hygiene students is being used by a graduate student of mine learning to run computer programs. Their paper is under revision and will be submitted for publication. And the program Directors and I have discussed joint ventures in research grant and funding proposals. There seems to be more funds federal and/or research funds available in the allied health areas than in education.

A Proposal

I propose Foundations turn outward and look inward. If we are to be valued, we must provide something of value - across our campus, for our communitites, and in our schools. But if we are to be valued, we must offer something of value.

I believe the adapted course for dental hygiene has something of value and is valued. A next project is to develop and offer a basic Foundations course for non-education majors at my University. We have no course, undergraduate or graduate, for non-education majors. We lose student credit hours, we lose credibility, and we lose the interest and support of the parents of children our schools are supposed to serve.

I believe if we turn outward, our value can be known; when we then look inward, we see what we have valued.

I close with these words spoken of a True Professor of the Foundations:

> Through his efforts, practitioners are no longer limited to design models unrelated to the nature of their field. Often in opposition to his colleagues, (he) opened a door to us. He is the classic Chaucer scholar: 'gladly would he learn and gladly would he teach'.